

Town of Absecon
New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail
Intersection of U.S. Highway 30 and
County Road 585
Absecon
Atlantic County
New Jersey

HABS No. NJ-1038

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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDING SURVEY
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
DEPARTMENT OF INTERIOR
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20013-7127

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

TOWN OF ABSECON

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Location: New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail, Intersection of U.S. Highway 30 and County Road 585, Absecon, Atlantic County, New Jersey

Significance: Absecon is representative of the early eighteenth-century bay fishing villages which grew up along Shore Road, the main transportation artery prior to the railroad.

History: Like the surrounding communities, Absecon grew up along the Shore Road. The early development of other local roads in the area, such as, present-day West Church Street established in 1821, Pitney Road and Mechanic Street, cleared in 1833, and Illinois Avenue, established as Reed Road in 1844, suggests a steady growth rate during the first half of the nineteenth century.¹ By 1835, a "tavern, store and 8 or 10 dwellings, surrounded by sand, and pine forest,"² were established in Absecon. Kirkbride's New Jersey Directory of 1850 listed one shipbuilder, Uriah Adams, one hotel keeper, H. Shillingsforth, one physician, Jonathon Pitney, and six merchants, Myers & Houston, Wm. Conover, Daniel Steelman, Ezra B. Cordry, R. Smith, and Enoch Doughty & Sons, in town.³

Absecon's own Dr. Jonathon Pitney is best remembered as the founder of Atlantic City. His 1799 home, which he purchased in 1824, still stands on the west side of Shore Road. After the mortgage was paid off in 1847, Dr. Pitney set about to improve his situation. He literally sliced the old house in half and removed one portion. To the remaining half, he attached a square, three-story house with a cupola.⁴ Just across the road, the Doughty house also remains standing. Daniel Doughty was given a piece of land by his father in 1811, and soon started acquiring other tracts. It is believed that a house was already standing on this site, which Doughty added to in 1831. In doing so, he reversed the orientation of the house, so that it faces the Shore Road instead of the bay. Doughty over-extended himself in business, and lost the property in sheriff's sale in 1835. His brother, Enoch, acquired the property, and passed it to his son, John Holmes Doughty, who brought his bride here in 1841. They, in turn, altered the house in the late 1850s, adding the cross gable and plastering the exterior.⁵ Both the Pitney and Doughty houses are shown on Beers' Map of 1872. Also shown are a hotel, Odd Fellows Hall, school, Methodist

¹ Ewing, Sarah W. R. and McMullin, Robert, Along Absecon Creek (Bridgeton, NJ: C.O.W.A.N. Printing, 1965), 255-57.

² Thomas F. Gordon, Gazeteer of the State of New Jersey (Trenton: Daniel Fenton, 1834; reprint, Polyanthos, 1973), 92.

³ Kirkbride, "New Jersey Directory of 1850" in Atlantic County Historical Society Yearbook 9 (October 1980), 17-19.

⁴ Ewing and McMullin.

⁵ Ewing and McMullin, 276.

Church, Presbyterian Church, railroad depot and engine house. A shipyard is shown on the north edge of Absecon Creek.⁶

An interesting site outside of Absecon is the Seaview Country Club, located on the west side of Shore Road (Route 9) just north of the city line. Mr. Clarence Geist, of Philadelphia, purchased a tract of farm land and opened the Seaview Golf Club in 1915. Members came from Philadelphia by train to the Absecon railroad station, where they were met by Seaview "Station wagons" and transported to the eighteen-hole golf course. Sam Snead won the 1942 PGA Championship Tournament at Seaview.⁷ Like the other mainland suburbs of Atlantic City, Absecon is a combination of residential and commercial development. After crossing the White Horse Pike, Route 9 travels through an older section of town with quiet, tree-lined streets. The Pitney Tavern Restaurant, located at the northern end of Absecon, retains the name of its most famous resident.

Prepared by: Camille Gatza
HABS Historian
Summer 1991

- Sources:
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- Ewing, Sarah W., and McMullin, Robert. Along Absecon Creek. Bridgeton, NJ: C.O.W.A.N. Printing, 1965.
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- Sebold, Kimberly, and Sara Amy Leach. Historic Themes and Resources within the New Jersey Coastal Heritage: Southern New Jersey and the Delaware Bay. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Interior, 1991.
- Young, Eugene V. The Story of Galloway Township. Galloway Township Bicentennial Committee, ca. 1976.

⁶ Beers, Topographical Map of Atlantic County, 1872.

⁷ Eugene V. Young, The Story of Galloway Township (Galloway Township Bicentennial Committee, ca. 1976), 92.

Project Information:

This project was sponsored by the New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail (NJCHT) of the National Park Service, Janet Wolf, director. The documentation was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS), Robert Kapsch, chief, under the direction of HABS historian Sara Amy Leach, project supervisor. Three historians completed the research during summer 1991: Field supervisor Sarah Allaback (Massachusetts Institute of Technology), Alfred Holden (University of Vermont), and Camille Gatz (North Carolina). David Ames (University of Delaware) made the large-format photographs. Historian, Elizabeth Harris May (George Washington University), edited the HABS reports.

ABSECON

Scale 300 ft per inch.



H. C. Woolman, Surv.